

[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Church Growth](#)
[Directory](#)
[Leadership](#)
[Ministry](#)
[New Church](#)
[News](#)
[TAP/PATHWAYS](#)[Donate](#)

Thursday, 14 Feb 2013

News[Breaking News](#)[Feature Focus](#)[Celebrate](#)[Conference News](#)[Local Church News](#)[Lifting Up...](#)[NEWS Archives](#)[Resources](#)**SECUCC eNewsletter****Sign up for SECUCC****Email Newsletter** YOU ARE HERE: [HOME](#) ► [LOCAL CHURCH NEWS](#)**Local Church News - February 2013**

Barbara Brown Taylor and David Gushee to address Piedmont College conference on religion and politics, Feb. 22-23



Religion and politics, two subjects certain to start a "conversation," will be at the center of a two-day Piedmont College conference to be held in Athens, GA, in February.

"Faith and Citizenship: Religion in the Public Square" is the theme for the college's sixth annual Religion and the Liberal Arts Conference, which will feature addresses by Barbara Brown Taylor, professor of religion at Piedmont; and by David P. Gushee, director of the Center for Theology and Public Life at

Mercer University.

"While the recent presidential election served to focus issues, the debates do not end once votes are cast," said conference organizer and Piedmont chaplain Ashley Cleere. "Concerns about justice, privacy, hospitality, neighborliness, and compassion occupy both religious and political discourse."

Cleere said the conference will examine the role religion plays in questions such as, "Who may be married? Is torture ever right? How much responsibility do humans bear for climate change? When does life begin? When is prayer appropriate in public settings? Under what circumstances are immigrants to be welcomed? How are health care needs to be met?"

The conference will be held Feb. 22-23. The fee is \$150 per person, which includes the evening banquet and address Feb. 22 at the Classic Center, as well as the plenary address, two workshop sessions, and two meals on Feb. 23 at the Piedmont College Athens campus. For more information about the conference, accommodations, and online registration, visit www.piedmont.edu/rc.

Barbara Brown Taylor has been an Episcopal priest since 1984 and is the author of 12 books, including the *New York Times* best-seller "An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith." She has taught religion at Piedmont College, where she holds the Butman Chair in Philosophy and

**UCC News****UCC Newsroom**

Headlines from the United Church of Christ

UCC groups host immigration reform vigils on Ash Wednesday

To commemorate Ash Wednesday and the beginning of the church's penitential season, several United Church of Christ groups and congregations hosted immigration reform prayer vigils Feb. 13

Southeast Conference FAQ's[Who is the SEC?](#)[Who is the UCC?](#)[How Do I Find a UCC Church?](#)[What Ministries are Available?](#)[Is Training Available?](#)

holds the Buchan Chair in Philosophy and Religion, since 1998.



David Gushee is a professor of Christian Ethics at Mercer, where he also chairs the Mercer Lyceum initiative on rebuilding democracy. He is the author of several books on ethics, including "The Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust," and he serves on the board of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. His 2003 "Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context," written with Glen Stassen of Fuller Theological Seminary, was named Theology/Ethics book of the year by *Christianity Today*.

Piedmont College is an independent liberal arts college of about 2,600 students with campuses located in Demorest and Athens. Founded in 1897, Piedmont is affiliated with both the UCC and the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches. The college offers undergraduate degrees in 44 major areas, master's degrees in education and business, and a doctoral degree in education.

Same-Sex Couples Seek Recognition in Mobile and Alabama

Sondra Scott and Jan Parker, new members of **Open Table: A Community of Faith** in Mobile, AL, were married in Massachusetts after being together for 28 years. Jan was at Sondra's side in the hospital as she battled cancer. "Fortunately we were in an area where they didn't deny her as part of my family so she could be there at the hospital for me," said Sondra.

Kim McKeand and Cari Searcy were married in California and now live in Mobile.

Kim is the legal parent of their son. Cari would like to share legal custody. "He had to have open heart surgery when he was three years old," said Cari. "So during that time we ran into issues with me being able to administer his care." Standing in their way is Alabama law, which prohibits same-sex marriage and recognition of such marriages from other states. Today, both couples, backed by supporters from the group Southern Equality, the We Do campaign, and Pastor Ellen Sims of Open Table, set out to seek that recognition as they silently walked to the Mobile County License Commission.

It's something that civil rights groups are doing across the south. Jasmine Beach-Ferrara of the Campaign for Southern Equality was among them. "We're traveling across the south this month," she said, "taking action in small towns and larger cities, pushing for full equality under federal law, and we'll keep pushing until we reach that goal."

Once inside the License Commission office, Sondra and Jan sat down to ask that their marriage be recorded in the state records. "We can do that," said the clerk, "but that's all we can legally do." They were told to step to the next window. Kim and Cari did just that, where their marriage certificate was entered into Alabama record. But both couples know that's where it stops.

Latest News

Most Read Articles

[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Church Growth](#)
[Directory](#)
[Leadership](#)
[Ministry](#)
[New Church](#)
[News](#)
[TAP/PATHWAYS](#)
[Donate](#)


Thursday, 14 Feb 2013

News

[Breaking News](#)
[Feature Focus](#)
[Celebrate](#)
[Conference News](#)
[Local Church News](#)
[Lifting Up...](#)
[NEWS Archives](#)
[Resources](#)

SECUCC eNewsletter

**Sign up for SECUCC
Email Newsletter**

Southeast Conference FAQ's

[Who is the SEC?](#)
[Who is the UCC?](#)
[How Do I Find a UCC Church?](#)
[What Ministries are Available?](#)
[Is Training Available?](#)
YOU ARE HERE: [HOME](#) ► [LIFTING UP...](#)

Lifting Up... February 2013



The family and church home of Dr. Richard C. Braun, a resident of Cumberland County for 36 years and member of **Pleasant Hill Community Church**, in Pleasant Hill, TN, who died on Sunday, December 2. He suffered an aortic dissection on Thanksgiving Day and was taken from his home in Pleasant Hill to Cumberland Medical Center in nearby Crossville, TN. He was treated for a week before being moved to Wharton Home on the Uplands Retirement Village campus in Pleasant Hill, where he died two days later. He was 82. Dr. Braun died the way he had lived: with grace, in love, and in peace.

Richard Charles Braun was born in St. Louis in 1930, to T. C. and Viola Braun. He received a Bachelor of Science degree from Grinnell College in Iowa and a Doctor of Medicine degree from the Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis. At Grinnell College he met Gertrude "Trudy" Camp, and at Washington University he and she strengthened their friendship while she earned her nursing degree. They married in 1953.

In 1956 Dr. and Mrs. Braun were commissioned as medical missionaries by the United Church Board for World Ministries, and in 1957 they and their young son arrived in the newly independent African nation of Ghana.

In Ghana, Dr. and Mrs. Braun served together at hospitals in Worawora and Adidome. In addition to caring for patients at hospitals and rural outreach clinics, they trained Ghanaian nurses and medical students, ensuring that their work would continue after they left Africa.

In 1971 Dr. and Mrs. Braun and their children came to Cumberland County for a two-year furlough. His parents had recently retired in Pleasant Hill, and he was drawn to the area by the reputation of the Cumberland Clinic Foundation, which he joined.

At the end of their furlough, Dr. and Mrs. Braun, with their three younger children, returned to Ghana for their last term there. In 1978 they left Ghana, having served the sick and healthy people of that country for 21 years, and moved back to Cumberland County, this time to stay.

Dr. Braun resumed his work with the Cumberland Clinic Foundation. When the CCF closed in 1990, Dr. Braun began private family practice. He retired from private practice in 1993 but continued to volunteer his time and medical skills to people in underserved places, including Native American reservations in North Dakota and Arizona, the hurricane-wrecked coast of Honduras, and a remote town in the Himalayas of Nepal.



UCC News

UCC Newsroom

Headlines from the United Church of Christ

UCC groups host immigration reform vigils on Ash Wednesday

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in the Himalayas or Nepal.

He remained on the staff of the Cumberland Medical Center and also accepted the position of medical director at Wharton Home in Pleasant Hill, the town where he and his wife made their home, continuing in that capacity until just last year.

He wrote frequently about health care issues in the *Crossville Chronicle* column "The Lion and the Lamb." He received many awards and honors but was most proud when he met or heard news of any of the thousands of people he had delivered into the world. He was an active member of the Pleasant Hill Community Church and of Uplands Village.

Richard C. Braun is survived by his brother, Theodore A. Braun (a retired minister of the United Church of Christ), and his cousin, Marian Braun Ziebell, both of Pleasant Hill; his wife; his four children and their spouses; six grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

His family suggests that those who wish to honor his life might make donations to the United Church of Christ Global Ministries (www.globalministries.org) or Uplands Village (www.uplandsvillage.com).



The family and **First Congregational Christian Church** in Montgomery, AL, upon the death of the Rev. Dr. Paul E. Johnson on January 14. Dr. Johnson served as pastor of First Church from 1980 to 1985, and returned in 1988 before retiring in 1993. He was married to Shirley Ann (Williams) Johnson for 55 years and had two children, Paula Lyman and Darryl Johnson.

Paul Edwin Johnson was born in Buffalo, NY and ordained on November 30, 1958 by the Congregational Christian Churches (shortly to become the UCC) at Grace Congregational Church in Manhattan (Harlem), NY. Early in his career, Dr. Johnson served as associate pastor of North New York Congregational Church in the Bronx, NY. He attended Talladega College in Alabama; the Hartford Seminary Foundation in Connecticut; Harvard University, and Auburn University.

He served as a chaplain in the U.S. Army, which resulted in his being awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star for Valor, the Air Medal, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Army Commendation Medal, and the Parachutist Badge. Upon retiring from the Army as a lieutenant colonel, he was employed by the Alabama Department of Mental Health/Retardation as Quality Assurance Coordinator for Community Programs, Division of Mental Retardation. Dr. Johnson was a veteran of the Vietnam War.

Dr. Johnson had held ministerial standing in the Alabama-Tennessee Association since 1974, even before assuming the First Church pastorate, due to his long residence in the Montgomery area.

The family requests contributions be made to the Dr. Paul E. Johnson Education Scholarship Fund at Max Community Credit Union in Montgomery in honor of Dr. Johnson.



News

[Breaking News](#)
[Feature Focus](#)
[Celebrate](#)
[Conference News](#)
[Local Church News](#)
[Lifting Up...](#)
[NEWS Archives](#)
[Resources](#)

YOU ARE HERE: [HOME](#) ► [BREAKING NEWS](#)

LGBT Ministry and Advocacy in the UCC



Churchwide Consultation on the Future of LGBT Ministry and Advocacy in the UCC

Overview

The UCC Coalition for LGBT Concerns and the UCC's Office for Health and Wholeness Advocacy have launched The Churchwide Consultation on the Future of LGBT Ministry and Advocacy. The Consultation is meant to be a listening project that takes place in as many settings of the UCC as possible. We are interested in hearing from any and all churches regardless of ONA status and encourage as many as possible to participate. Racial/ethnic meetings, youth and young adult gatherings, clergy clusters and annual Conference/Association meetings are also excellent venues for this conversation.

Why: We know that no one voice can speak for all parts of our mutual ministry. In order to develop strategy, program and to foster deeper understanding in the various settings of our denomination, we must listen to one another. Our project is an attempt to hear the wisdom of many different voices to collectively form a vision for the future of LGBT Ministry and Advocacy.

Who: People within and among our various settings of the United Church of Christ.

What: The Consultation is a focus group or conversation hosted in churches, seminaries, clergy groups, Associations and Conferences. Diversity of settings are a goal. The constant is that all groups will be asked the same questions.

How to get involved: Once you've decided to participate. Select a venue, choose a facilitator, the facilitator registers to participate in a webinar training, host the conversation, record your responses, send in the data.

To get involved contact the Consultation Coordinator: Rev. Tara Wilkins,
consultation@ucccoalition.org , 503-484-3609.

Pathways- A Sojourners' Community



PATHWAYS: A Sojourners' Community

by Sarah Kim

The second cohort of PATHWAYS participants gathered together on the last weekend of October for the first course in the Level 1 program—Self and Community in Context. The retreat was facilitated by the Rev. Dr. Sarah Kim and Ms. Andrea Mai, with 11 participants from Nashville, Knoxville, and Atlanta. Over the period of two days, the group explored the notions of “self” and “community” and their contexts, which are defined by each individual's narrative of his or her life journey.

In the end, the group created a brand-new community of fellow learners, a gathering of sojourners with like minds, concerns, and aspirations. The remarkable aspect of our time together had to do with everyone's openness to share with honesty and enthusiasm and to listen with open hearts and compassion. We learned not only the theories about self and community, but practiced “being ourselves” and “becoming a community.” Below are the comments made by some of the participants as they reflected on their group experience:

“I want to expand my knowledge to the limit and take it and use it to the good of people like myself that has needed it, needed the help, and needed the guidance.”

“The strongest impression that has stayed with me is the sense of being in the right place at the right time with the right group of people. My mantra during our prayer times was ‘God in me, me in the world.’ I will carry this mantra with me throughout the PATHWAYS journey.”

“We were able to open up to each other and form a viable and vibrant community. It's amazing to me that we have come to this place and time in each of our lives at exactly this moment has to be a ‘God thing.’”

“When I consider how I want to be in the world, I want to be more sensitive, compassionate, and responsive toward all people. The depth of the sharing between strangers reminded me of our commonality. It is far easier to dwell on our differences. It helped me remember that an open heart is very inviting!”

“I don't understand how people can grow in their understanding of religion when there is no community to support and challenge them. This group, I believe, will do that.”

“I met ten people who are searching for a closer relationship with God; people who are filled with excitement for the journey, and unafraid. I met ten people who are willing to stretch their minds, to question, to doubt—to clarify.” “I love the people, and the heartwarming stories that were shared along with the laughter and tears are footprints planted in my soul. The presence of God and my classmates helped me reaffirm my calling.”

The group was much greater than the sum of its parts, I believe, because the Divine Presence was moving and working in our midst. I pray that we continue to carry this momentum of love for the community and the zeal for learning throughout our PATHWAYS experience.

Latest News

[LGBT Ministry and Advocacy in the UCC](#)

[Pathways- A Sojourners' Community](#)

[Home](#)
[About Us](#)
[Church Growth](#)
[Directory](#)
[Leadership](#)
[Ministry](#)
[New Church](#)
[News](#)
[TAP/PATHWAYS](#)[Donate](#)

search...

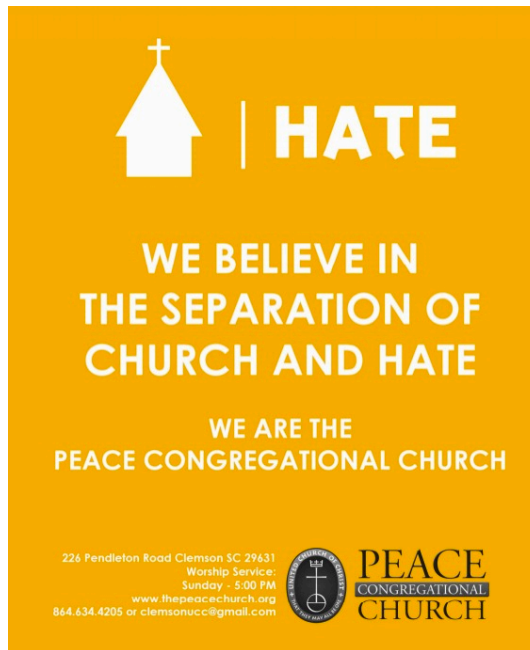
Thursday, 14 Feb 2013

News[Breaking News](#)[Feature Focus](#)[Celebrate](#)[Conference News](#)[Local Church News](#)[Lifting Up...](#)[NEWS Archives](#)[Resources](#)**SECUCC eNewsletter**
**Sign up for SECUCC
Email Newsletter**

Southeast Conference FAQ's[Who is the SEC?](#)[Who is the UCC?](#)[How Do I Find a UCC Church?](#)[What Ministries are Available?](#)[Is Training Available?](#)YOU ARE HERE: [HOME](#) ► [FEATURE FOCUS](#)**Feature Focus - February 2013****Getting the Word Out in Style****Peace Congregational's Nontraditional Evangelism**

by Anna Flowers

While UCC congregations have never shied from taking public stands for social justice, they have typically been less forthright in communicating about themselves. Not so for Peace Congregational Church in Clemson, SC. Spurred on by dynamic leadership and the marketing and graphic design talents of two members, Peace



Congregational has been not-so-quietly leading a movement in the Southeast Conference of claiming and proclaiming our UCC values in the communities we serve.

A relatively recent SECUCC church plant, Peace Congregational Church knows the importance of marketing, which is why members began a marketing campaign last year centered around 10 posters, widely distributed, and aimed at catching the public's attention. With messages like, "Rock Bands Don't Make a Church Modern," or "Bible Belt Too Tight?" Peace Congregational did not shy away from walking the line of gentle provocation and controversy.

"They're a little edgy, which is what we wanted, and they speak to the South," said the Rev. Susie Smith, church pastor, in a [recent article](#) published by the national UCC News. "We knew we needed to reach a new group of people. There aren't many UCC people around here that have grown up in UCC churches."

**UCC News****UCC Newsroom**

Headlines from the United Church of Christ

UCC groups host immigration reform vigils on Ash Wednesday
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And reach them they did. According to the Rev. Ms. Smith, at least four new members have joined Peace Congregational specifically because they saw the posters. Countless others have come as visitors.

Additionally, the existing congregation received a huge boost in morale from the project. "The whole congregation was invited to make suggestions, and we actually used almost everyone that was suggested," said Smith. With the whole congregation involved, not only the creative energy was shared – but the goodwill it created as well. "We were proud of [the posters] and proud of the response we were getting to them from everyone who saw them, whether they were part of our congregation or not," she said .

A lot can be gleaned from Peace Congregational's successful campaign – from the congregation's unabashed marketing efforts, to a congregation-wide engagement in the process. But not every UCC congregation has the capacity to build and recreate as successful a marketing campaign. Thankfully, Peace Congregational Church is as generous as its people are talented. While the congregation has specifications for use, the people happily share the poster files to all UCC congregations who want to use them.

The SECUCC could not be prouder and more grateful for the faithful efforts of Peace Congregational Church!

[Download the posters.](#)

[Learn more about Peace Congregational UCC.](#)

Latest News	Most Read Articles
LGBT Ministry and Advocacy in the UCC	Southeast Conference UCC (SEC)
Pathways- A Sojourners' Community	UCC History and Polity
Conference News - February 2013	Southeast Conference Campaign
Local Church News - February 2013	Steps to Planting a New Church
Lifting Up... February 2013	Global Theological Education

SECUC C CONTACTS

▶ Conference Minister

▶ TAP Director

▶ SEC Donations

▶ Church Development

▶ Communications Director

SECUC C RESOURCES

▶ Annual Meeting

▶ Global Theological Education

▶ Local Church News

▶ SEC Churches

▶ Seminars/Webinars

FAVORITE LINKS

▶ Bridge 4 Faith

▶ The Center for Progressive Renewal

▶ United Church of Christ

▶ Mission Insite

▶ Resource Center

EVENTS CALENDAR


« < February 2013 > »


S	M	T	W	T	F	S
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	1	2

HomeAbout UsChurch GrowthDirectoryLeadershipMinistryNew ChurchNewsTAP/PATHWAYSDonate

search...

Thursday 14 Feb 2013





Southeast Conference
UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

Print

PDF

Email

News

Breaking News

Feature Focus

Celebrate

Conference News

Local Church News

Lifting Up...

NEWS Archives

Resources

SECUCC eNewsletter

Sign up for SECUCC
Email Newsletter

GO

YOU ARE HERE: [HOME](#) ► [CONFERENCE NEWS](#)

Conference News - February 2013

Conference Minister Search Report

As you know, our beloved Conference minister, the Rev. Dr. Tim Downs, is retiring this June. In preparation for his retirement, the Conference Board of Directors has appointed a search committee consisting of the individuals listed below. Along with Susan Towner-Larsen, UCC Minister for Conference Relations, this committee met for the first time on January 12, 2013 to begin the discernment process. It is a wonderfully diverse and gifted group, who represent a wide spectrum of our Conference life. Their work is just beginning, and the committee will be sure to keep us informed as progress continues. Meanwhile, please lift up the members in prayer as they do this holy work together on our behalf.

- Jennifer Austin, Holy Trinity Community Church UCC, Nashville
Joanne Calhoun, Circular Congregational Church UCC, Charleston, SC
Regina Drake, Victory Church, Stone Mountain, GA
Rodney Franklin, First Congregational Church UCC, Birmingham
John Gill, Church of the Savior, Knoxville
Leah Lyman Waldron, Praxis United Church of Christ, Atlanta
Marvin Morgan, Fairfield Glade Community Church, Fairfield Glade, TN
Lyle Weible, Pleasant Hill Community Church UCC, Pleasant Hill, TN

Southeast Conference FAQ's

- [Who is the SEC?](#)
[Who is the UCC?](#)
[How Do I Find a UCC Church?](#)
[What Ministries are Available?](#)
[Is Training Available?](#)

Latest News	Most Read Articles
LGBT Ministry and Advocacy in the UCC	Southeast Conference UCC (SEC)
Pathways- A Sojourners' Community	UCC History and Polity
Conference News - February 2013	Southeast Conference Campaign
Local Church News - February 2013	Steps to Planting a New Church
Lifting Up... February 2013	Global Theological Education

SECUCC CONTACTS

► Conference Minister

► TAP Director

► SEC Donations

► Church Development

► Communications Director

SECUCC RESOURCES

► Annual Meeting

► Global Theological Education

► Local Church News

► SEC Churches

► Seminars/Webinars

FAVORITE LINKS

► Bridge 4 Faith

► The Center for Progressive Renewal

► United Church of Christ

► Mission Insite

► Resource Center

EVENTS CALENDAR

« < February 2013 > »

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	1	2

Steps to Planting a New Church

News

Contact Us

Donate

Home About Us Church Growth Directory Leadership Ministry New Church News TAP/PATHWAYS Donate



News

Breaking News

Feature Focus

Celebrate

Conference News

Local Church News

Lifting Up...

NEWS Archives

Resources

YOU ARE HERE: [HOME](#) ► [CELEBRATE](#)

Celebrations - February 2013



Kim Shelton, a candidate ordainable pending a call in the Alabama-Tennessee Association, and a graduate from ITC in Atlanta, has just received a call to serve as an associate pastor at of a new church start in the Chicago Metropolitan Association. Kim is a member of Community Congregational UCC, Montgomery. She will be ordained in March.

David Sigmund, ordained at Kirkwood UCC, Atlanta, GA has been called to serve as Senior Pastor of Seaside Community UCC, in Torrance, California. His installation will take place on February 10th.

The Rev. Tom Warren, pastor of Pleasant Hill Community Church in Pleasant Hill, TN, has recovered successfully from surgery and has returned to work after several weeks of convalescence.

SECUCC eNewsletter

Sign up for SECUCC
Email Newsletter

Southeast Conference FAQ's

Who is the SEC?

Who is the UCC?

How Do I Find a UCC Church?

What Ministries are Available?

Is Training Available?

Latest News

[LGBT Ministry and Advocacy in the UCC](#)
[Pathways- A Sojourners' Community](#)
[Conference News - February 2013](#)
[Local Church News - February 2013](#)
[Lifting Up... February 2013](#)

Most Read Articles

[Southeast Conference UCC \(SEC\)](#)
[UCC History and Polity](#)
[Southeast Conference Campaign](#)
[Steps to Planting a New Church](#)
[Global Theological Education](#)

SECUCC CONTACTS

- Conference Minister
- TAP Director
- SEC Donations
- Church Development
- Communications Director

SECUCC RESOURCES

- Annual Meeting
- Global Theological Education
- Local Church News
- SEC Churches
- Seminars/Webinars

FAVORITE LINKS

- Bridge 4 Faith
- The Center for Progressive Renewal
- United Church of Christ
- Mission Insite
- Resource Center

EVENTS CALENDAR

February 2013						
S	M	T	W	T	F	S
27	28	29	30	31	1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25	26	27	28	1	2

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